

Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force

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Monroe County Fire Bureau



Maggie Brooks
County Executive

Juvenile Firesetting Trends contributed by Fred Rion

Special points of interest:

- *Safety & Prevention Information*
- *Treatment Resources in OUR Community*
- *Up To Date Research*
- *Safety Tips*
- *Educational Information*

Just as we see trends in the games children play or the music they listen to, we also see trends in the type of firesetting behaviors that children engage in. The purpose of this article is to inform individuals of some of the types of firesetting behaviors that children are engaging in. By no means is this an all-inclusive list, as the trends seem to change on a regular basis.

One of the biggest problems facing juvenile fire-setter intervention programs

today is the accessibility of information that children have. Although the Internet is a wonderful tool, information such as how to construct a bomb out of everyday materials found in the home is just a "mouse click" away to many children. It is important for parents, school staff, library staff and others who may allow children Internet access in their settings to be cognizant of where kids are "surfing".

In addition, television programs, movies and video games that children use on a daily basis also provide children with ideas for dangerous behaviors such as combining ignition sources with flammable liquids, that fire is

something they (children) can control or that fire is something that will not hurt them (or others). For this reason, regardless of a child's age, it is important for parents to know what programs children are watching on television and to discuss with children the "realities" and misinformation that is sometimes presented as fact. Another important and sometimes easily missed thing for parents to do is check their child's room on a regular basis. Children seem to keep everything in their room. This includes items such as lighters, matches or other ignition sources. A simple check on a regular basis can prevent some of these behaviors. **(Continued on page 4)**

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County Fire Bureau Secures Smoke Detector Grant

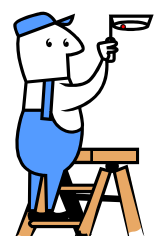
For the second consecutive year, the Monroe County Fire Bureau's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention program has secured a grant from the New York State Health Department-Bureau of Injury Prevention.

This year the award is \$15,000 and over 1,500 extended life smoke detectors. The smoke detectors will be installed in the

homes of individuals and families residing in the towns of Webster and East Rochester. Last year, JFIP installed nearly 1,000 smoke detectors in the town of Irondequoit. The target populations for the project are the elderly, families with children and low income families. If someone is interested in participating in the project and they live in either Webster or

East Rochester, they can leave a message at 279-4063 and a project representative will contact them.

For all other inquiries, contact Fred Rion at the Monroe County Fire Bureau at 279-4050.



Art Therapy Program for Child Burn Survivors

The Finger Lakes Regional Burn Association was recently awarded a grant from the Guido & Ellen Palm Foundation. The monies from the grant were used to hire Nazareth College's Aphasia Clinic to oversee an art therapy program for child burn survivors. The FLRBA is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing awareness of burn related injuries and assisting burn survivors in several areas of their recovery.

The concept of the art therapy program for the child burn survivors grew from observations that the child burn survivors were not progressing well in the "traditional talk therapy" approach and that perhaps the art therapy approach may work better.

The theory has paid off as nearly a dozen child burn survivors have taken part in the 10 week program and the results have been nothing less than extraordinary. The program has helped some of the children to "open up" and discuss their feelings as they relate to their injury like never before.

The art therapy has also served as a type of healing for the body, as well as the mind in that it has helped to improve the flexibility of a few of the children through their working with clay and other materials that work the muscles.

On June 16th, an art show was held at Nazareth College's Little Art Gallery displaying the children's work.

Plans are in the works by the FLRBA directors to secure future funding in order to continue the art therapy program for child burn survivors in the future and possibly open the program to **juvenile firesetters** as an alternative therapeutic approach.

If you would like more information on the Finger Lakes Regional Burn Association, are interested in becoming a member of the organization or are interested in making a donation, you can visit them at www.flrba.com or contact the FLRBA President John Hall at 482-6770.



RAIHN: A Service Available for Families in Need Contributed by Erica Vera, MSW

The Rochester Interfaith Hospitality Network or RAIHN is a non-for profit, non-denominational organization of faith communities.



RAIHN provides shelter, food, personalized care management and a broad network of caring vol-

unteers for families. There are 28 congregations and a volunteer base of 600 individuals supporting the program. Thirteen of the twenty-eight congregations are host congregations.

RAIHN has the capacity to house 14 families within the congregations and these congregations serve as temporary homes for families. The goal is for families to regain independ-

ence and move to an affordable and safe house. Christians, Jewish and Buddhist congregations are involved, making Rochester the most diverse network in the USA. There are currently 108 Networks operating in the USA. For more information in the Rochester area, contact Erica Vera, MSW at 506-9050 or e-mail her at evera@raihn.org or you can visit RAIHN on-line at www.raihn.org.

Normative Studies of Children & Fire: An International Issue

Much of the research on juvenile firesetters has studied troubled youths who were receiving intervention services for misusing fire, or incarcerated youths who, after interviewing, were found to have firesetting experiences. For the incarcerated youths, firesetting episodes often were not the reason for incarceration, but were part of a larger array of delinquent behaviors.

The research raises some interesting questions: Are all juveniles who misuse fire troubled or delinquent? Just how common is misuse of fire among juveniles in general? This question has intrigued researchers around the world. This article discusses research conducted in Sweden, Canada and the United States on the normative fire behavior of juveniles. The three North American studies surveyed students and each study borrowed questions from, and expanded on, the study that preceded it.

Dr. Yvonne Terjestam, Ph.D., University of Lund, began surveying 736 compulsory school children in 1995 about their experience with fire. The students in Hs cited their motives for setting fires as "wanting to see something burn" (38%), "because they were bored" (27%), "because they were angry or wanted to destroy something" (10%).

The children's attitudes toward fire were varied. Over half think that fire is "fun" (60%), more than a third think it is "exciting" (36%), and only about a fourth think it is "terrible" or "frightening".

The first North American survey, *Fireplay Report* (1999) was done in Surrey, B.C., by Ken Jones of the city of Surrey Fire Service, the Surrey School District, and the University

College of Fraser Valley (Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice). The survey sampled 1,351 students from grades one through twelve.

Results of the survey indicated that fireplay among school-aged youths is a very common behavior and that fireplay experiences increase, for both males and females, as they grow older. Elementary youths involved in fireplay activities were predominantly male; in secondary schools males and females were equally represented. In grades eighth through twelve, 75% of the students reported continuing with fireplay activities despite being taught about fire safety; 50% continued despite being punished. Most of the students said they did it "just for the fun of it".

In 2001 the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal conducted the *Fire Interest Survey* in partnership with thirteen school districts across Oregon and the institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior at the University of Oregon. In all, 5,416 students in grades three through eighth responded to a questionnaire which was a modification of the questions used in the 1999 Surrey, B.C. study. Students were asked questions about fire-related knowledge, behavior and attitudes.

Fifty-three percent of the youths reported never starting an unsupervised fire. Ninety-four percent reported receiving fire safety education in school and were able to answer the majority of the fire knowledge questions correctly. Ninety percent believed that negative consequences can follow unsafe fire use. Middle school students were more likely to report an interest in fire, more likely to start fires, less likely to report being afraid of fire, and less likely to think

that negative consequences can follow unsafe use of fire. Data from the Oregon study indicate that firesetting behavior is not normative, that about 6% of the students may require more intensive intervention, and that prevention efforts would best be targeted at students in elementary school (ages six through ten).

Oregon students gave four major reasons for involvement with fire: "just for fun" (23%), "to destroy something" (22%), "because they were bored" (19%) and "to see what would happen" (18%).

The most recent study, *A Survey of the Disposition, Affinity, Interest and Experience with Fire of Students in the City of Greater Sudbury* (2002, Ontario, Canada), was done by André Cotterall, B.A. Criminology, MA. Applied Social Research. Cotterall surveyed 3,031 students from grades three through thirteen.

Several conclusions support the two prior studies: 1) "Most students set fires just for the fun of it, to destroy something, out of boredom, or to see what will happen . . . just for fun was the number one reported reason . . . males in general and those students in higher grades start more fires for each of the reasons listed"; 2) "fire Safety education was found to have a positive influence on a student's ability to answer each of the fire knowledge and fire safety questions correctly . . . although fire knowledge is important, it does not stop a student from playing with fire"; 3) "Students do not have fixed motives for starting fires, and whatever reason a student has reported for starting a fire, they are likely to report other reasons. This certainly points away from the utility of classifying children or youths and motives (**continued on next page**)

Inside Story Headline

For starting fires into discrete categories”; 4) “The analysis up to this point also indicates that as students move from grade five to grade six (an aver-



age age of ten and eleven years old) whether male or female, they will begin to show a sharp increase in the level of fire play experience and fire play behaviors”.

These studies, taken together, represent the normative fire behaviors of 10,534 youths. Fire safety education and punishment appear to be ineffective at stopping the behavior. The reasons juveniles give for fireplay or firesetting—just for fun, boredom, to destroy something, or to see what will happen—clearly should be factored into a proactive

intervention program.

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Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program Contributed by Lori Smegelsky

The Adolescent Sexual Aggression Program began in 2000, as a joint project with Monroe County Probation, New York State Office of Mental Health, Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and Monroe County Department of Human and Health Services. The county has contracted with Unity Behavioral Health to provide the sex offender specific evaluations and treatment when indicated. The program consists of two full time clinicians, Pat Larkin, CSW and Lori Smegelsky, MS.Ed. The pro-

gram is 100% grant funded and all services are provided at no cost to the adolescents or their families.

Referrals to the program originate from Family Court, Probation and OCFS. Evaluations are completed on any youth in the legal system exhibiting sexually aggressive behavior. An assessment of the adolescent is completed to help provide recommendations regarding risk factors, type of treatment indicated and appropriate level of care.

Youth admitted for treatment must be adjudicated of a sex offense or of other charges, or have a documented history of sexually inappropriate behaviors. When appropriate for community based sex offender specific treatment, the youth would be recommended for admission to this program. Services are offered to adolescents both as a community based treatment while on probation or following a residential placement and reintegrating into the community on **(continued opposite next page)**

Juvenile Firesetting Trends (Continued from Page 1)

In regards to other trends that adults should be aware of when it comes to children engaging in firesetting, “blow torching”, where a flammable liquid (in an aerosol or spray form) is sprayed into an open flame thus causing a fireball is very popular.

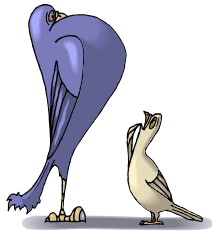
Other popular trends observed today are homemade potato cannons, novelty lighters, playing

“games” in which one child sets another’s hair or clothing on fire (and who ever puts theirs out first loses the game) or home made bombs. In regards to the home made bombs, parents should be on the look out for some of their common household cleaning items, aerosol products or other potentially dangerous fuel sources disappearing quicker than their normal usage would allow.

These are just a few things to be on the look out for. Therefore it is important to pay attention to the behaviors children are taking part in and report to the Monroe County Fire Bureau’s JFIP regarding children who are engaging in these or any firesetting behaviors so that they may be educated and we can all prevent an unnecessary tragedy. For more information, call Fred Rion at 279-4050

Bullying: Addressing the Issue Locally Contributed by Elizabeth Meeker, Psy.D.

In the fall of 2002, a subcommittee of the Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force was formed to address the issue of bullying. The subcommittee was formed in recognition that common to many youth engaging in high risk behavior, such as



firesetting, drug/alcohol abuse, self-injury, and criminal behavior, is the emotional pain ex-

perienced due to bullying. The subcommittee includes representatives from mental health, law enforcement, multiple school districts, community agencies and parents. Two primary goals of the Bullying Prevention Subcommittee are to increase community awareness of this issue and to foster a community approach toward solutions. In May 2003, Youth Emergency Services (YES) in partnership with the Finger Lakes Regional Burn Association and the Monroe County Fire Bureau, sponsored a community

wide conference on bullying prevention, attended by over 350 people.

As a follow-up, a second conference, focused on specific strategies for prevention and intervention, is planned for November 5, 2004. This spring, YES and the Consortium on Trauma, Illness & Grief in Schools (TIG) will launch a bullying prevention website. Included on this site will be fact sheets, links, and other resources for youth, schools, parents and practitioners. **(Continued on bottom of page 6)**

Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program (Continued from previous page)

Aftercare. The program provides individual, group and family treatment modalities with a cognitive behavioral and psycho educational approach.



The services are provided at the juvenile probation office. The collocation offers many benefits to

clients, probation officers and the clinicians of the program. The duration of treatment typically parallels the term of probation or OCFS Aftercare. If additional services are needed such as mental health, psychiatric consult or chemical dependency services, the referrals will be made and treatment coordinated.

Program Goals

the goals of the program are:
(1) To reduce recidivism rates of sexually abusive juveniles. (2) To increase

the adjudication of juveniles coming into contact with the juvenile justice system in order to hold them accountable and to mandate treatment. (3) To reduce the length of stay in OCFS facilities and to increase the community adjustment of youths transitioning back to the community following placement.

For further information about this resource, please contact Pat Larkin at 428-4670 or Lori Smegelsky at 428-1981.

What do you want to see?



The goals of this newsletter are to provide information, share resources and improve the service provision to children and families throughout our community. We are hopeful that our message is reaching a wide audience, but we also want to hear what you, as the reader are interested

in learning. So, if you have an article that you would like to contribute or if there is a topic that you would like to see addressed, please contact Fred Rion at the Monroe County Fire Bureau at 279-4053 or e-mail him at frion@monroecounty.gov. In addition to wanting your input, we also hope that you will share this newsletter with others. For additional copies of this newsletter or if you like to be

added to the e-mail distribution list, you can also contact Mr. Rion and he will be happy to assist you.

We look forward to hearing from you in the future and have a SAFE SUMMER!

The Importance of Poison Prevention Contributed by Amy Davis

The Finger Lakes Regional Poison and Drug Information Center is excited to celebrate its 50th year of service to the public. As the first poison center in the country to counsel the general public about poison and poison exposures, we continue our goal of providing 24/7, free, and

confidential information to everyone who calls 1-800-222-1222.



Each phone call received at the poison center is answered by a physician, nurse, or pharmacist with extensive and specialized training in poison and poison exposure treatment. Our center also offers free presentations for any group interested in a general or topic-specific presentation regarding poison prevention. Our two Health Educators work closely with many community organizations and are eager to expand their outreach to anyone interested.

Spring and summer are very active and busy seasons around our

homes. Please take a moment to read the following tips on how you can prevent an accidental poisoning. And remember, always call the Poison Center immediately if you suspect someone you know has had a poison exposure. We are there 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help you.

Poison Prevention Tips

- Keep all household chemical products and medicines locked up and out of reach of children
- Do not give or take medicine in the dark or without your glasses.
- Children love to explore these areas.
- Never let children out of sight when these products are in use, even for a moment.
- Never call medicine "candy". Avoid taking your medicine in front of small children. Children love to imitate adults.
- Use child-resistant packaging.
- Store all medications and household products in original containers and away from food.
- Keep purses and coat pockets free of vitamins, medicines, tobacco products and cosmetics.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet periodically and dispose of outdated medicine by flushing it down the toilet and rinsing the container before throwing it out.

Bullying: Addressing the Issue Locally (Continued from page 5)

In addition, the site will feature a Community Toolbox, with interventions currently being implemented in our community. The site can be accessed through either www.yesprogram.org or www.tigconsortium.org. For more information about the Bullying Prevention Subcommittee or to schedule a workshop on bullying prevention, contact Elizabeth Meeker, Psy.D.,

Program manager YES/TIG at 613-7632 or emeeker@ccsi.org.



Importance of Playground Safety Contributed by Darla Bugner

Each year over 200,000 children are injured seriously enough in playground related accidents that they require being seen in the emergency department of a hospital. That's one child every 2 1/2 minutes. That means by the time you have finished reading this article, it's likely another child will have been injured.

On average, 17 children die each year from playground related accidents. The majority of injuries occur on public playground equipment, with approximately 45% in

schools, 31% in public parks, and 10% in commercial daycares. Home based day cares; apartment complexes, fast food restaurants and other locations account for the remainder.

An interesting fact is that while the majority of injuries occur on public playgrounds, the majority of deaths occur in our own backyard playgrounds.

The most prevalent diagnoses were fractures (39%), lacerations (22%), contusions/abrasions (20%), and strains/sprains (11%). Over 75%

of injuries are related to falls to the surface as a contributing factor. Roughly 40% are related to inadequate supervision. Approximately another 1/3 of injuries are related to improper equipment maintenance. For more detailed statistical data, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov or the National Program for Playground Safety at www.uni.edu/playground. For more information local on playground safety, e-mail Darla Bugner, CPSI at drbugner@rochester.rr.com.

Wheeled Vehicle Safety Awards Contributed by Jean Trist

The Monroe County Office of Traffic Safety and the Rochester General Hospital Association and TWIGS hosted the 16th Annual Wheeled Vehicle Safety Awareness



Awards Ceremony on Thursday, June 3, 2004, at the U.S. Army Reserve Center in Irondequoit. The ceremony honored kindergarten through sixth

grade winners of the coloring and writing competition that promotes safety in our community. Out of 3,645 entries, there were 28 grand-prize and 401 first-place winners honored. The first-place winners picked up their new bicycle helmet at a special safety display by Galyan's in Marketplace Mall, on June 11th and 12th.

The Monroe County Office of Traffic Safety and Rochester General Hospital Association TWIGS sponsors the program. The Association donated the 28 bicycles and hel-

metts for the grand-prize winners and 401 helmets for the first-place winners.

The contest includes all forms of wheeled vehicle safety: bicycle, in-line skates, roller-skates, skateboards and scooters.

Students in kindergarten through third grade competed in a coloring contest. The kindergarten to second grade entrants color a safety picture and the third grade entrants draw a picture showing children being safe on a wheeled vehicle and using a helmet. Students in grades four through six compete in a writing contest. The writing contest consists of submitting an essay, rap song or poem about wheeled vehicle safety and using helmets.

For their safety, it is imperative that children use helmets and wear protective equipment consisting of elbow pads, kneepads, and wrist guards. Nationally in 2001, 134 children ages 14 and under died in bicycle-related crashes and in 2002, more

than 288,900 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.

Initiated by Dr. Donald Eldredge in 1989, as a Bicycle Helmet Poster Contest, the contest began as an educational campaign. Since the first year with only 132 entries and less than 5% of children wearing helmets, it has grown into a profound community-wide program with over 50,000 students having participated. Since the New York State law was passed in 1992 mandating helmet use for children under 14 years of age, helmets have significantly reduced the numbers of deaths and hospitalizations for bicycle related head injuries by fifty percent.

The role of the participating schools has also been crucial to the program's success, since the contest promotes wheeled vehicle safety and helmet usage for school-age children. For more information contact Jean Triest, Monroe County Office of Traffic Safety, at 428-4903.



Monroe County Fire Bureau

Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program
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“Thank you to all task force members for making a difference in our community. Understanding the fire setting behavior of youth is key to preventive education. Your role in that process is invaluable.”

-Maggie Brooks, County Executive

The Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force is a group of professionals and parents from the community who are committed to research and education about the community-wide problem of fire prone children and their misuse/abuse of fire. Their goal is to establish effective preventive measures when it comes to children and the problem of firesetting. The Task Force has over 50 members who work on several sub-committees such as Public Service Announcements, Prevention & Education, Bullying, Mental Health, and Parent Support. All task force members donate their time, expertise and resources to help address the community problem of juvenile firesetting.

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT

WWW.MONROECOUNTY.GOV

Task Force Members Receive Local Honors

Three task force founding members have been honored locally for their contributions to the prevention of juvenile firesetting and/or serving their communities. Those task force members are Abraham Crews, Larry Crawford and Fred Rion.

Mr. Crews was honored as the City of Rochester Fire Department's 2004 Firefighter of the year. Mr. Crews has nearly 25 years of service with the Rochester fire Department and for the last 15 years has been a fire investigator and founding team member of the City's Fire Related Youth Program. Mr. Crews has worked with and provided invaluable education to countless numbers of

children throughout Monroe County who have been involved in firesetting behaviors.

Mr. Crawford was the recipient of the 2004 Willie W. Lightfoot Youth Advocate of the Year Award. Mr. Crawford has worked as a deputy and juvenile investigator with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office for the last 30 years. Mr. Crawford will also be retiring at the end of June 2004. Over his career Mr. Crawford has been one of the strongest and most vocal advocates for children in this area. His retirement will create a void that will not easily be filled.

Finally, Mr. Rion is the re-

cipient of the 2004 Kiwanis International Distinguished Service Award. Mr. Rion is being honored for his efforts over the last 4 years as the Program Coordinator of the County Fire Bureau's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention program. Mr. Rion has been involved with the development of many recent initiatives within the juvenile program and has worked very hard throughout the County and the State to increase awareness of the problem of juvenile firesetting.

The Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force applauds the efforts of its members and congratulates them on their awards.